DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 231 162 EC 152 607

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TITLE Special Education Inservice Priorities for Regular Educators.
PUB DATE [81]
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDPS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Needs; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Teachers; Individual Needs; *Inservice Teacher Education; *Learning Disabilities; Mainstreaming; *Needs Assessment; Questionnaires; Resource Teachers; *Surveys

ABSTRACT

To identify content and format priorities for special education inservice training, 243 elementary classroom teachers in 21 schools with learning handicapped (LH) programs were surveyed. A questionnaire was developed to elicit responses to 22 topics and 21 methods of inservice training, with category selection based on a Likert-type one to four point scale. Teachers ranked as highest content priorities the need for information on: (1) legislation regarding the education of handicapped children, (2) working with behavioral and emotional problems of LD students, and (3) educational goals for the students. The top priority preferences for format were: (1) impromptu discussions with resource specialist, (2) workshop on the minimum day, (3) resource specialist demonstrations of materials or techniques in class, and (4) resource specialist demonstrations in school. Findings confirmed results of previous studies with regard to two major findings: (1) the best way to assess staff needs is by surveying the staff, and (2) the best time for inservice activities is during school hours. Among seven recommendations is that special education inservice training for regular elementary teachers should be provided by resource specialists. (MC)

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SPECIAL EDUCATION INSERVICE PRIORITIES FOR REGULAR EDUCATORS

ED231162

Abstract: Content and format inservice priorities of regular elementary teachers were determined. Results of this needs assessment indicated that regular teachers are interested in (a) legislation regarding special education and (b) how to deal with behavior problems in the classroom. Data indicated that teachers favor learning new information and skills from on-site special education personnel (resource specialist) rather than traditional workshops. Recommendations for state and local staff development programs for regular educators are discussed.

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EC 152607

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The intent of federal legislation for the handicapped (Public Law 94-142) is to provide appropriate educational opportunities in the least restrictive environment . For the majority of learning disabled and educable mentally retarded students of elementary school age, the least restrictive environment is the regular classroom with support services from special education personnel (Hayes & Higgins, 1978).

The success of mainstreaming depends upon regular and special education professionals being able to assume new roles for which they may require training or re-training (Reynolds & Birch, 1977). In order for regular class placement to benefit special education children, regular class teachers need retraining in special education techniques. The success of such inservice training depends upon teacher commitment and recognized need. Obtaining teacher input becomes an important aspect of planning inservice programs.

The purpose of this investigation was to identify both content and format priorities for special education inservice training as preferred by elementary classroom teachers involved in mainstreaming learning handicapped students.

METHOD

Participants were faculty members from 21 schools in a western state. All schools operated programs for learning handicapped students and were selected to include varying geographic locales. A total of 243 regular elementary classroom teachers were surveyed regarding their identified needs for inservice in the area of

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education for learning handicapped students. Teachers indicated specific content needs and format preferences for inservice training. Questionnaires were presented and collected at 21 schools during faculty meetings. The questionnaire was developed for this investigation to elicit responses to 20 topics and 21 methods of inservice training. Respondents were asked to select the category on a Likert-type one to four point scale that would best describe their interest in such inservice activities ("Could you use help in _____ content?" and "would you accept it in _____ format?": Definitely yes, probably yes, probably no, and definitely no).

Data were analyzed to determine overall priorities. Kendall's coefficient and Kruskall-Wallis Tests were used to analyze differences between subgroup rankings on the variables of: (a) years of teaching experience; (b) years of experience in teaching learning handicapped students; (c) grade level assignment: (d) credential status; (e) degree status; and (f) geographic characteristics of the school.

RESULTS

The major special education content inservice training needs identified by regular classroom teachers were for information on legislation regarding the education of handicapped children and for specific skills in (a) working with behavior problems and emotional problems of learning handicapped students in the classroom, and (b) identifying appropriate educational goals for learning handicapped students (Table 1).

TABLE 1

Rank Order of Content Area Needs

Rank	Item Number	Item Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	5e	knowledge of laws related to handicapped students	3.20	.96
2	6l	dealing with children with emotional disorders	3.20	.88
3	5b	identifying goals for learning handicapped students	3.14	.92
4	5i	dealing with behavior disorders	3.09	.90
5	5r	selection, identification, and use of appropriate special education materials	3.08	.88
6	5h	specific information about handicaps	3.07	.90
7	5m	learning characteristics of learning handicapped students	3.07	.88
8	5j	assessing students' strengths, weaknesses, interests and skills	3.02	.80
9	5c	conferencing with parents of learning handicapped students	2.97	.95
10	5k	teaching peer relations to learning handicapped students	2.95	.87
11	5n	incorporation of individual instruction within a group	2.92	.91
12	5s	teaching techniques	2.88	.89
13	5q	understanding your role in IEP meetings	2.84	.98
14	5d	teaching normal students to relate with the special education child	2.82	.87
15	5f	general information about handicaps	2.81	.99
16	5o	curriculum planning skills	2.77	.92
17	5v	evaluating pupil progress	2.75	.93
18	5u	referral process	2.70	.89
19	5a	similarities and differences between normal and handicapped children	2.68	.99
20	5t	classroom management skills	2.62	.91
21	5g	working with other teachers in the classroom	2.50	.97
22	5p	directing an aide or volunteer	2.47	.96

The top priority preferences for inservice training format were: (a) impromptu discussions with resource specialist; (b) workshop on minimum day; (c) resource specialist gives demonstrations of specific materials or techniques in class through working with special students; (d) demonstrations in school by resource specialist. The commonality between these choices is the element of time (Table 2). All aforementioned items involve either time scheduled within the teaching day, or time that is individually arranged by each teacher, as distinguished from most inservice sessions which occur after school or on Saturdays.

Conversely, the lowest priorities for format of inservice were: (a) correspondence course; (b) formalized self-study program; (c) college or university course; and (d) individualized self-administered instructional media programs.

One important common factor is that three of the four priority modes of inservice training are personalized. Consultation with a resource specialist allows for questions and answers on issues relevant to the teachers' present classroom situations. Success in inservice training programs is largely dependent upon relevance to participants' needs and involvement in planning. Both concerns for teacher involvement are addressed by the use of resource specialists. This allows teachers to request information and/or services as they become important for working with a specific child, group of children or parents. The resource specialist as an on-site faculty member is more available as immediate needs arise than experts in the field or

TABLE 2

Rank Order of Format Priorities

Rank	Item Number	Item Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	6f	impromptu discussion with resource specialist	3.18	.85
2	6l	workshop scheduled on minimum day	3.15	.93
3	6u	resource specialist gives demonstrations of specific materials or techniques in class through working with specific students	3.12	.85
4	6s	demonstrations in school by resource specialist	3.05	.81
5	6n	programmed instructional materials	2.89	.94
6	6b	occasional lectures by prominent experts	2.86	.88
7	6g	periodic seminar type conferences or meetings	2.85	.93
8	6t	occasional professional conferences	2.79	.87
9	6i	occasional training conferences	2.78	.94
10	6j	periodic scheduled meetings with designated person	2.77	1.02
11	6o	scheduled periodic conferences with resource specialist	2.77	1.03
12	6m	on-call specialist from other than local school	2.76	.89
13	6k	instructional media program for group presentation	2.65	1.02
14	6r	professional journals and information publications	2.54	.90
15	6q	all day workshop	2.52	1.00
16	6h	after school workshop	2.48	.99
17	6d	informal self-study program	2.34	1.02
18	6p	individualized self-administered instructional media programs	2.29	1.14
19	6c	college or university course	2.2[illegible]	1.03
20	6e	formalized self-study program	2.1[illegible]	.95
21	6a	correspondence course	1.8[illegible]	.93

other school consultants. This element of timing also increases the likelihood that suggestions made or skills learned will be used in the classroom. Resource specialists are available to offer follow-up support, feedback, and reinforcement to encourage the practice of new skills.

The major differences among teachers' preferences were found between groups of respondents who teach different grade levels or who work in schools in varying locales. Teachers of upper grade students indicated more interest in gaining information and skills in several content items than did teachers of primary grade students. Teachers in rural schools differed from their colleagues in other geographic settings in their preferences for inservice format. Teachers in rural schools indicated having inservice training provided for them through more options than did other teachers.

The greatest source of variation on format items was with regard to the variable of geographic locale of the school. In each item where there was variation, teachers in rural schools had more interest in receiving inservice training in that format than did teachers in urban or suburban schools. Teachers in rural schools have less access to conferences or colleges and therefore would be interested in these programs being made available to them. Because of the lack of opportunity for formal univeristy courses, self-study programs which require no travel, would be welcome to teachers in rural areas.

Inservice providers should consider offering content options for teachers within the same school or district to accommodate differences

in needs between upper and primary grade teachers. Inservice training providers at district, regional, or state levels should consider format needs of teachers in rural schools to assure attendance at workshops and/or that the information and skills training reaches the appropriate audience.

The preference for receiving informal inservice training from resource specialists is extremely significant. The resource specialist role has recently been defined in California legislation to include the functions of inservice education and consultation with regular teachers. Consultation can assist teachers with services to students and acquisition of new skills. In the context of least restrictive environment, the use of resource specialist consultive services for students placed in the regular classroom is the least restrictive environment. In two recent studies (Evans, 1980; Ballard-Campbell, 1981) resource specialists in California as well as a neighboring state estimated very little, five percent or less, of their professional duties and time to involve consultation. Further findings indicated that resource specialists, regular teachers, and principals agreed that more time for consultation between resource specialists and regular teachers was important.

This study supports the fact that regular teachers realize the value of the consultative role of the resource specialist, and are interested in using these services in addition, if not as an alternative, to traditional inservice programs. This is becoming increasingly

significant in an era when budget situations are influencing the amount of resource specialist time; many resource specialists are now required to serve more than one school. While the number of students in a resource program may be appropriate on paper, by traveling to two or more schools within a day or week, the amount of staff to receive consultation from one resource specialist is increasing and the time to provide it decreasing.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

Findings of this study support much of the literature on inservice; specifically, the theories proposing that inservice is effective when teachers are asked what they want. Hutson and Silvernail (1980) concluded that the best providers of inservice are master teachers and administrators within the local system who are viewed by colleagues as having credibility and expertise. Two other major findings also parallel this study: (a) the best way to assess the needs of a staff for inservice training is to survey that particular staff; and (b) the best time for inservice activities is during regular school hours.

The major recommendation of this study is that special education inservice training should be at the local school level coordinated by resource specialists. Essential for this to be a viable and effective means of providing inservice training is that resource specialists have skills as inservice trainers. It becomes important to direct inservice training toward groups of resource specialists. Such training should focus on: (a) creating and administering on-going needs assessments; (b) interpreting and planning from needs assessments; (c) techniques and strategies for delivering inservice training;

(d) scheduling and coordinating time for inservice activities; (e) documentation of inservice activities; and (f) coordination of inservice activities with other agencies and professionals.

It is further recommended that each teacher be allotted a specified amount of release time, with options to use it for: (a) visitations to other schools or classrooms; (b) scheduled and formal meetings with resource specialists; (c) conferences or workshops; or (d) time for self-instructional programs. Teachers as well as districts would be responsible for documenting the topics of inservice during their flexible staff development time. This system allows for teachers to choose the time, duration, and format of inservice delivery while being responsible for acquiring knowledge and skills in all major areas, taking needs and interests into account.

Considering legislative intent, teacher duties, and responsibilities of district administrators to provide inservice in special education, it is further recommended that budgets of local schools include money for release time for teachers for staff development activities, and that districts provide funds for time to train resource specialists.

In summary, the following recommendations are made:

1. Special education inservice for regular elementary teachers should be provided at the local school level.
2. Special education inservice training for regular elementary teachers should be provided by resource specialists.
3. Training on conducting and coordinating inservice for teachers should be provided for resource specialists by regional and/or state agencies.
4. Minor reorganization of state staff development plans should occur

to allow a concerted focus on resource specialist training.

5. District administrators responsible for special education inservice training should be encouraged to support inservice activities that are on-going rather than large, one day workshops.
6. Release time should be provided for teachers to allow time for flexible scheduling of inservice activities.
7. State legislatures must provide financial support for special education inservice training.

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